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ABSTRACT

For a variety of reasons, vocational education has not made it in America. Our high schools have not been able to make sure that every young man and woman who receives a diploma is qualified either for immediate employment or further education. To solve the problems of this situation, the Office of Education is giving major emphasis to the design of a workable career education system that can be tested at a number of Federally financed pilot installations and, when satisfactorily developed, offered to the entire country. Along these lines three model career education programs are being developed--one for use in schools, a second to be generated within the business community, and a third to take place in the home. These models represent the first attempt to devise a career education system for virtually all Americans, from which the learner spins off at any level of maturity, whether as an auto mechanic or a physician, at the level of growth he chooses. (JS)

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EDUCATING FOR THE REAL WORLD*

By S. P. Marland, Jr.
U.S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

As a veteran of more than 30 years in education --- and with the scars to show for it --- I believe I am fully capable of appreciating just what Ted Lowery is feeling at this moment.

It was Calvin Coolidge, a man of few but pungent words, who put it best. Shortly after leaving the office of the Presidency in 1929, Mr. Coolidge had occasion to register for membership in the National Press Club in Washington. As is usual in such procedures, he was given a form to fill out. One blank on the form was marked "occupation", and another was labelled "remarks."

After the first Mr. Coolidge wrote "retired." And after the second, he inscribed, "Glad of it."

And so, I may safely assume, is Ted Lowery.

As a friend and a fellow education professional, I am delighted and deeply honored to be invited to this gathering tonight to join in a splendid tribute by the good people of Jefferson County to their retiring Superintendent of Schools. Your outpouring of generosity and affection, so obviously heart-felt and sincere, scotches the notion

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morbidly nursed by oversensitive superintendents in their darker hours --- the idea that public commitment to education is more talk than substance, that most people do not notice or even particularly care whether their schools are being run well or not and that school administrators are scorned. After filling the office of superintendent for two decades myself, I occasionally shared this feeling of rejection --- particularly when a budget failed to pass or a bond issue was voted down, or when the young took to the barricades.

But I would be surprised if Ted Lowery regrets a single day of the 23 years that he has given to what I can only describe as one of the most complex, demanding, and difficult jobs in the public or private enterprise. Historian Henry Steele Commager has said that "No other people ever demanded so much of education as have the Americans." And no doubt thinking of men and women like Ted Lowery, he adds, "None other was ever served so well by its schools and educators."

Education has its problems, as anyone who reads the paper is aware, and yet despite the turmoil of the city schools, despite the campus unrest and the educational dilemmas surrounding us, I am bound to say that American education is far better at this moment in history that it has ever been.

The education offered in 1948 --- when Ted Lowery assumed the office of Superintendent of Jefferson County Schools and I obtained my first superintendency --- is hardly comparable to the education of today

--- in the numbers of pupils served, in the level of learning they are offered, in the professional skills of those who instruct them and guide their progress, in the facilities and equipment the people of America have so generously afforded for the ends and purposes of education.

The duties of the U.S. Commissioner of Education incude reporting annually to Congress on the condition of education in the Nation. In the report I made at the end of March I said this:

"We can take legitimate satisfaction from the tremendous progress of recent years. The sheer size of the American commitment to education is amazing, with over 62 million Americans --- more than 30 percent of the population --- actively engaged as students or teachers. More than three million young men and women will graduate from high schools throughout the country in June 1971, as contrasted with fewer than two million 10 years ago. Nearly 8.5 million students are enrolled in higher education as contrasted with slightly more than four million 10 years ago."

Progress of this magnitude does not occur accidentally or comfortably. The struggle that we have been going through to improve, to equalize, and to extend education has been difficult, often painful. It has essentially been a struggle between those who are well served by the institution, and content to have things stay as they are, and those who are neither content nor well served.

We have moved ahead impressively during Ted Lowery's term in office because he and others like him have been willing and able to challenge accepted thought and to prod the public conscience and to accomplish change --- however taxing and uncomfortable the process.

And that process is far from complete, if complete it will ever be. Indeed, I would predict that the future will be even more demanding --- more critical examination of present practice, more challenge directed at teachers and administrators, more insistence on the development of different and better ways to teach, more accountability to the people.

From the Federal point of view, this pursuit of excellence in education leads us in a number of directions simultaneously --- toward equalizing educational opportunity, still our number one concern; toward improving the opportunities for schooling that are afforded to the culturally, economically, and socially deprived children of this country, the millions who exist in urban and rural ghettos; toward improving the condition and expectations of the mentally and physically handicapped.

Still another Federal priority, and one that I would like to discuss with you tonight because of the professional concern of many in this audience with economic productivity, is improving the way we prepare young people for a lifetime of work. We have traditionally referred to this preparation as vocational education. I call it --- in a new term with new meanings --- career education.

Bluntly speaking and for a variety of reasons, vocational education has not made it in America. Our high schools have not been able to make sure that every young man and woman who receives a diploma is qualified either for immediate employment or further education. American business, individually and through organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce,

has repeatedly expressed and demonstrated its faith in education. That faith, I am sorry to say, too often has found us wanting.

A special report on public education in California put out by the Pacific Telephone Company in 1968 is an example of the kind of support the business community is prepared to provide. The report said in part: "No force helping the individual or the nation to grow is stronger than education. If a society is to lead, flourish and perhaps even survive, its people must grow steadily in knowledge and understanding."

I hope Pacific Telephone is still on our side, though I wouldn't blame them if they were a bit discouraged. Last week the president of the company, Jerome Hull, was quoted in the public press to the effect that four out of every 10 high school graduates who come his way are inadequately trained in the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Mr. Hull reports that out of the 300,000 job applicants interviewed each year, almost half "will not meet even our modest basic requirements."

The grave failure of this Nation to prepare its young for work is not the fault of the vocational educators, since only about 12 percent of our high school students have traditionally been exposed to some kind of skill-producing training, though that percentage has gone up in the last year due to the larger amount of Federal funds being made available to the field.

Alongside this small percentage we must place another statistic of the current educational scene --- that fully half of all high school students enroll in college after graduation. Superficially that sounds fine. But too many take this step, I fear, because a pernicious con-

formism infecting our society forces them to flock to campuses to get credentials many really don't need --- or, at least, shouldn't need. Given the inflexible law of supply and demand, the flood of bachelors degrees has inevitably reduced their value as an entree to a good, professional job primarily because there simply aren't that many jobs in the American economy that require a college education. And we now have a dangerous oversupply in some professional fields --- teaching for one, the aerospace industry for another.

Finally, in addition to the vocational and academic tracks, there is a third group of students, those locked into the ill-conceived, unproductive general curriculum.

The general curriculum, for those of you not familiar with it, is a fallacious compromise between the true academic liberal arts and the true vocational offerings. It is made up, as its name suggests, of generalized courses, possessing neither the practicality and reality of vocational courses nor the quality of college-preparatory offerings. Watered down mathematics, nonspecific science, "easier" English --- such is the bland diet offered in the name of the general curriculum --- not much to chew on, not much to swallow.

We normally think of discrimination as an illegal separating-out process based upon racial and ethnic considerations. I regard the general curriculum as just as discriminatory and just as outrageous.

Students in this track have little likelihood of attending college where their immaturity, confusion, and indecision about a career can be masked for a few more years. And, given the vagueness of their high school preparation, they have no prospects for a decent job

when --- and if --- they graduate. About 750,000 youngsters drop out before graduating high school each year --- most of them from the general curriculum. Certainly it is no assumption, but fact, that nearly all of our youthful unemployed, those between the ages of 16 and 23, are victims of this shame. America, richest of all nations, has the additional crude distinction of the highest youth unemployment rate in the world --- a frightening amount of it concentrated among the minorities and urban poor.

Career education would provide the training these students require for successful employment and it would give them the education they need to bring personal fulfillment into their lives. It would teach reading, writing, and arithmetic as the fundamental skills. It would at the same time stress the ability to think, decide, and judge --- the "survival skills." While career education will necessarily and properly embrace many of the vacational-technical education's skill-producing activities, it will also reach a large percentage of students presently unexposed to the usual vocational offerings.

Career education, in sum, would reflect a far broader understanding of the purpose of education in today's highly sophisticated, technical, change-oriented society --- the need not only to fit a person to function efficiently but to make him aware of why he is doing what he is doing .....and to bring relevance to our classrooms for many who, with reason, now find them irrelevant.

It is no longer enough for a man or woman to know only that there is a button to be pushed, or a bolt to be tightened, or a needle to be threaded. To maintain our democratic and technological equilibrium, it seems to me

that every American must be aware of the full ramifications of his work in both the physical and social environment. He must share with the rest of our society a workable set of human values against which progress in a personal sense and community sense can be measured. He must be able to evaluate and use new developments. In short, he must be educated, not just trained.

Because I am so convinced of the urgency of this matter, the Office of Education research staff is giving major emphasis to the design of a workable career education system that can be tested at a number of federally financed pilot installations and, when satisfactorily developed, offered to the entire country.

We have begun to develop three model programs --- one for use in schools, a second to be generated within the business community, and a third to take place in the home. These models represent the first attempt to devise a career education system for virtually all Americans, from which the learner spins off at any level of maturity, whether as an auto mechanic or a physician, at the level of growth he chooses.

The school-based model is oriented directly toward the school setting from kindergarten through junior college. Its basic objective will be to guide each student either to a job at the completion of high school or to further formal education.

The home-community model is designed to reach and teach individuals, especially adults, with little formal schooling or with limited skills that hold them back from job opportunities or advancement. We believe occupational training of this sort can be effectively transmitted by television in emulation of the highly successful Sesame Street preschoolers' program,

beaming directly to home TV sets information on such matters as career options and job conditions, followed by access to cassette TV tapes for home learning, and procedures for re-entry into systematic skill learning.

Because you are a business-oriented audience, however, I would like to give special attention to the third of the three career-education plans, the employer-based model. This is the most radically new of the three plans in that it proposes establishment of an alternative education system, separate for all practical purposes from the public schools, enrolling students on a completely voluntary basis, and supported by the public school system by contract.

The model system would be created, developed, operated, and supervised primarily by an organized group, or consortium, within the community. Groups of this kind are to be found in a number of American cities where businessmen have turned the talents and expertise of their corporations to the needs of the schools. The idea is to systematize and greatly expand such cooperative effort between business and education. Though typical existing arrangements are small and involve only a handful of local businessmen and educators, they indicate a pattern of mutual concern that can be applied nationally.

In December of 1968, I chaired a meeting of schoolmen and businessmen called for the purpose of exploring the further development of their relationship. Superintendents and school board members talked with executives of many of the Nation's largest corporations. Some from the very same cities met at that conference for the first time.

Participants repeatedly expressed the need for a strong new partnership in education between schools and industry. The question was how to bring that partnership about. How can school and business leaders gain ready access to each other? If these powerful institutions are to make common cause after a long history of independent and dissimilar operations, how are they to agree on common goals?

The answers to these questions may be contained in the employer-based career education model. As we now conceive of it --- recognizing that our ideas may be significantly changed as time goes by --- we think that enrollees would be in the 13-to-18 age group and mainly of two types --- those rejected by the traditional classroom and those who themselves reject the traditional classroom. This latter type, as you recognize, is increasingly common. The younger generation feels free to express a dissatisfaction that in the past was more often felt than expressed.

Our present concept is that the learning program would contain three basic elements. The first would be a common or core program centered around the academic fundamentals and aimed at achieving the level of knowledge demanded for satisfactory employment in the business concern sponsoring the program, and suitable to the needs of comparable corporations in the technological employment market. The second element would be an elective program offering a range of studies to complement the core program. I'm talking about a learning environment of computer programming, creative writing, business management, laboratory techniques, manufacturing skills, production standards --- instruction that addresses

not only career-related and college-related interests but also provides skills and knowledge needed for living a rewarding life in the real world of work.

The third element would be the learning program's most critical component --- a series of diversified work experiences specifically designed to give the student a taste of a number of possible careers, the live options that are open to him. For example, a student might be assigned to work in the parts department of an automobile dealership where he would use parts catalogues, handle inventory sheets, deal with real records, reports, purchase orders and the like.

Exposure to an actual working environment would involve the students in relevant learning --- give them an opportunity to view that world in terms of their own needs and aspirations and challenge them to put their interests and abilities to practical test. Far from providing such down-to-earth experience, the typical school shuts the child into an artificial world far removed from the pressures and expectations of adulthood.

I must stress that this model program is in an exploratory stage. We are certain only that something needs to be done to correct the failure of schools to prepare many students for useful careers, and with the cooperation of the business community, the models now being designed in the Office of Education appear to have a decent promise of eventual accomplishment. We expect that one or two pilot projects, funded by OE, will be functioning by September of 1972. Actual operation of each project will very likely be delegated by the consortium to a firm

of professional managers working in cooperation with the local school system. A close relationship with school authorities will obviously be essential to insure that the academic components of the program meet State legal requirements and to guarantee that graduates of the system receive certification of high school equivalency.

Many questions must be answered before we invite inquiries from communities that may be interested in obtaining planning funds from the Office of Education in order to design a projected employer-based system. If the model as I have tried to describe it seems to fit your present or future needs here in Jefferson County, I urge that you inform the Office of Education of your interest in participating in the program.

We will within the coming year have a fairly good idea of what business-run system we are looking for and what it should accomplish. But we will need the ideas of men and women such as yourselves who are intimately familiar with the conditions at the local level to tell us how the program might most effectively be operated here in Jefferson County and elsewhere throughout the country. We do not see this as something for industry to do without compensation. It would be a large new social arm of industry as a government partner.

Career education is the goal. It remains for all of us who are concerned with the employability of America's student population as businessmen and educators to discover the new ways to meet tomorrow's

needs not only of industry, but also of the many young people who are unsuited to the schools as they exist.

Again, let me say to the man we honor tonight, Ted Lowery, that you represent symbolically the marriage of industry and education. That is the message of this important gathering, as the businessmen of Jefferson County and the Office of Education in Washington, D. C. salute you.

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